# E. Phillips Fox

## 1865-1915

Ruth Zubans

National Gallery of Victoria

# E. PHILLIPS FOX
## 1865–1915

RUTH ZUBANS

JANE CLARK
Organising curator
for the Gallery

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National Gallery of Victoria

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# Sponsor's Message

The legal firm, Phillips Fox, is excited to be joining the National Gallery of Victoria in presenting to the public this unique exhibition of the prominent Australian artist whose work captured the light and colour of the French Impressionists: Emanuel Phillips Fox.

Phillips Fox, the firm, was founded by families who were not only pre-eminent in law but who, over several generations, made an enormous contribution to Australian art, literature and photography. Philip David Phillips, who founded the firm in 1863, was the uncle of the artist, and his legal practice was joined at the turn of the century by the artist's brother, Michael Philip Fox.

Both families had many clients who were closely associated with the arts, and some of the firm's more affluent clients, including the late Alfred Felton, were encouraged to make significant bequests dedicated to the promotion of the arts in Australia.

The tradition of strong cultural associations continues with Phillips Fox being instrumental in establishing, and lending its ongoing support to, the Bundanon Trust to develop and manage Arthur and Yvonne Boyd's gift to the nation.

Phillips Fox takes great pride in being more than just a law firm, and in its role in presenting this exhibition: *E. Phillips Fox 1865–1915*.

# Director's Foreword

The art of Emanuel Phillips Fox was celebrated in his lifetime for all the qualities we appreciate today: his perception of light, the sensuous textures of his paint, the beauty of his patterning and the clarity of his composition. To Fox the world appeared as a system of interacting and constantly changing colours, a vision developed in Australia and expanded during a career marked by his experience of the art worlds of Europe and Australia.

Born in Melbourne in 1865, Fox was raised in an atmosphere supportive of his artistic pursuits. He excelled in his studies at the National Gallery School, winning medals for landscape painting in both 1884 and 1886. Upon his arrival in Europe in 1887 he immersed himself in the artistic life of London and then Paris, while still retaining his contact with Australian artists. In 1894 he was the first Australian artist to be awarded a medal at the prestigious Paris Salon.

In France he gained first-hand knowledge of the work of the Impressionists. Time spent in the artists' colonies at Étaples and Le Pouldu in France, and in England at St Ives, consolidated his love of painting *en plein-air* and his fascination with the effects of light, and served to intensify his experience of colour and experimentation with paint. The ideas he absorbed in Europe were the hallmark of his teaching on his return to Australia in the 1890s, his brushstroke impacting directly on the style of McCubbin.

The exhibition begins with a landscape painted as a student, follows with the paintings from his first trip to Europe, those made around Heidelberg and in Melbourne through the 1890s and the turn of the century, and concludes with the work of his later years in Europe and the final paintings made in Australia before his death in 1915. This retrospective will introduce to a new generation the full range of Fox's work. His themes are conservative given the social and political upheaval of his times and the nationalist sentiment pervading Australian art and literature. We can see, however, that Fox was highly accomplished and not bound by the predominating involvement of his contemporaries in landscape painting. He was able to traverse genres, achieving acclaim as a virtuoso figure painter.

*E. Phillips Fox 1865–1915* continues the series of exhibitions by the National Gallery of Victoria that honour past figures in Australian painting, and offers a re-assessment of one of the most important, but probably under-regarded, Australian artists working at the turn of the century. Dr Ruth Zubans of the Department of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, has been the guest curator for this exhibition, and we are especially grateful for her work in realising this important retrospective and the accompanying catalogue.

James Mollison AO
*Director, National Gallery of Victoria*

# Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank the Director, James Mollison, for initiating the project and for his enthusiasm and support. Many members of the Gallery have helped to make the exhibition a reality: John McPhee, who oversaw the arrangement of the exhibition, Philip Jago with encouragement and professional advice, and, above all, Jane Clark, whose generous help, friendship and organisational gifts were invaluable; she acted as the Gallery's organising curator of the exhibition. I also thank Margot Holden for her care in editing the manuscript and Jo Waite for her sympathetic design of the catalogue. I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the various other sections and individuals in the Gallery: Sonia Dean for friendly counsel; Curators, Judith Ryan, Irena Zdanowicz, Bridget Whitelaw, Geoffrey Smith; Conservators, John Payne, Catherine Earley and Jo Shea; Registration, Gordon Morrison and Ann Rowland; Photography, Helen Skuse. My thanks also to Jennie Moloney for her assistance and vigilance, to Judy Shelverton, who patiently typed drafts of the manuscript, and to the Librarian, Michael Watson, for his ready help.

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# E. Phillips Fox

What struck us on entering the studio was the light that seemed to emanate from the pictures … The somewhat dull room, with its dingy hangings, appeared full of windows, out of which one gazed into the most exquisite bits of scenery … the dull room seemed lighted by the pictures.

*The Arena* (Melbourne, 20.10.1900, p.5)

He told me once that he no longer saw anything except as a colour-sensation … His gamut of greens is extraordinary fine and varied, and the purity of his colour still holds the sunlight imprisoned in the pigment.

Lionel Lindsay 'E. Phillips Fox', *Art in Australia* (1: 5, 1918)

Emanuel Phillips Fox was widely and affectionately known during the first half of this century but with the receding of the taste for the Edwardian and the cultivation of national imagery, his reputation as a household name has diminished. No longer are his works instantly recalled among the best-known in Australian art, although *The arbour* and *Moonrise, Heidelberg* in the National Gallery of Victoria, *The ferry* and *Art students* in the Art Gallery of New South Wales and *Al fresco* in the Art Gallery of South Australia were once among the most celebrated of Australian paintings. Fox's art of sunlight and fashion, of colour and élan, his range of light effects in the landscape — morning and evening — was new in the Australian context in its colour and texture. His was a sensuous and stylish art brought to its apogee in the milieu of the great European capitals, Paris and London, and in the popular painting centres of the English and French countryside where he worked *en plein air*.

However, his art was initially formed in Australia and reflected his family background, training, patronage and personal hopes. Fox's early training was grounded in the teaching of the National Gallery School in Melbourne under the drawing master Oswald Rose Campbell (1820–87) and the master of the School of Art, the director George Frederick Folingsby (1828–91). There he learnt the basic academic method of drawing from casts and from life, and of shaping painted compositions. To expand his horizons and seek wider training, Fox left Australia in 1887 for England and France.

He returned to his home town five years later and until 1901 painted in Melbourne and in the hills around Heidelberg. During this time he exhibited in Melbourne and other colonial cities, served on the council of the Victorian Artists' Society and founded a lively private art school. While introducing painting techniques that he had learnt in France, Fox shared some of the aesthetic interests of his fellow artists, working in mutual exchange.

Limited patronage during the depression made Fox reconsider his options and he decided to live abroad. But while his subsequent career after the turn of the century unfolded in Europe, mainly in France, Fox remained in touch with Australia through his family and Australian friends. He revisited Australia in 1908, returned once more in 1913 and stayed until his death in Melbourne two years later. Thus, to appreciate Fox we must look at the two contexts which shaped his work — Europe and Australia.

## Early life

Born on 12 March 1865 in Fitzroy, Emanuel Fox was the seventh of eight children of the Jewish photographer

Alexander Fox and his wife Rosetta, daughter of Jewish lay preacher Solomon Phillips. When Fox's parents drifted apart in the late 1860s, his mother was left with the children whom she nurtured with warmth and deep understanding; despite straitened circumstances, she supported the artistic aspirations of young Mannie (as he was known to family and friends). Without male guidance women were vulnerable in the colonial society of the 1860s so Rosetta's brother P.D. Phillips took on the role of the head of the family. He was a distinguished solicitor and Shakespearian scholar whose own sons and daughters were high-spirited and well educated. One of these cousins, Rosetta (Etta), later became Fox's student and an artist in her own right. Another, Lottie, for whom he developed a romantic attachment, was the sitter for the celebrated painting, *Portrait of my cousin*. In the late 1880s Mannie Fox's elder brothers Joel and Phil made it possible for the young artist to study abroad by lending financial assistance. Joel Fox became the Manager of Equity Trustee Co. while Michael Philip (Phil) was a solicitor and founding member of the Fox & Overend law firm which, after amalgamating with his uncle P. D. Phillips' practice, operated as Phillips, Fox and Masel and today flourishes as Phillips Fox, Solicitors. The family remained close throughout Fox's life. It is significant that he chose to include his mother's maiden name as part of his signature — hence Emanuel Phillips Fox.

Fox's artistic activity spans dynamic years in Australian history during which the six colonies moved from a state of dependence on Britain to Federation in 1901. This coincided with the passing of the Victorian age and the onset of the Edwardian era. His friends and contemporaries were the artists associated with the Heidelberg school. His closest friend was the British expatriate Tudor St George Tucker (1862–1906); they studied together in France and, later, co-founded the Melbourne School of Art. In 1905 Fox married the urbane English artist Ethel Carrick (1872–1952) and settled in Paris where they mixed with other expatriate painters — Australian, American and British — including Rupert Bunny (1864–1947) who became an important friend.

Although thoroughly trained in the academic style of studio painting, Fox's great love was to work in the open air. These two approaches blend in his work, combining a feeling for drawing and solid form with the immediacy and freshness of *plein-air* effects. The figure in sunlight was one of his favourite motifs. Fox's works exude a delicate feeling for light and refined colour and communicate an obvious pleasure in the materials and the act of painting. Sensuous paint textures animate the surfaces, and rapidly applied strokes from a range of different-sized brushes weave and intertwine, creating layers and ridges of paint of varied thickness.

## Going abroad

In 1887, after eight years' study at the National Gallery School and encouraged by his friend Tom Roberts (1856–1931), Fox left Melbourne to go overseas. He stayed briefly in England and then hurried to his destination, Paris — the capital of the artistic world. Venturing abroad brought increased sophistication and polish. It also signalled a conscious reaching out to wider experience, which for a colonial artist from a conservative culture did not necessarily involve the *avant garde* but opened a wide range of choices and offered fresh insights into an exciting diversity of styles. The dynamic of a cosmopolitan atmosphere, the exchange of ideas with artists from other countries, and the chance to compete in an international forum at the annual Paris Salons or the Royal Academy in London were incentives that challenged Fox's abilities. Although he highly valued the approval of his work by his academic teachers in France and applied himself diligently, Fox's reponse to the wider milieu was creative and selective. He absorbed varied elements and adapted them to his own evolving artistic practice.

Like other Australian artists in Paris, he enrolled at the Académie Julian, a popular informal studio, to perfect his drawing skills under the professors William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905) and Tony Robert-Fleury (1837–1911). His knowledge of French, learnt in Melbourne, enabled him to enter the École des Beaux-Arts — the official Government-sponsored school of fine arts. There, under the leadership of the academic realist and orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), he profited from incisive academic training and acquired confidence to tackle the painting of the human figure on a large scale.

During summer breaks Fox visited several of the popular international art colonies at Étaples in Pas de Calais, Le Pouldu in Brittany and Giverny in Normandy, where artists were committed to *plein-air* painting and peasant subjects. Later he joined the artists' colony at St Ives in Cornwall.

In France Fox was initially drawn to the work of

Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–84) who had gained a wide following with his paintings of peasant life on a large scale in outdoor settings. Bastien-Lepage's works combined academic drawing with features of direct painting and freer brushstrokes, adapted from French Impressionists. His figures were posed against a tilted background and bathed in grey light. Fox was attracted to the Frenchman's philosophy of painting peasants in their native settings; in several works, for example, *Autumn* (1889) and *Woodland nymphs* (1904), Fox used a similar upward-rising ground but avoided the grey muted colours.

Of far greater significance for Phillips Fox was his contact with French Impressionism which confirmed his own inclination towards colour, light and optical experience. At first his access was indirect, through the American painter–teacher Thomas Alexander Harrison (1853–1930) whose work united a conservative form of Impressionism with academic treatment, making his teaching accessible to Fox and many American artists. Harrison was a liberating influence: he possessed a particular gift for releasing his students' native talents and generating a flexible approach. It is possible that Alexander's brother Lowell Birge (1854–1928) and Birge's Australian wife Eleanor Ritchie Harrison (1854–95), who were acquainted with several Australian artists and had built a studio at Étaples, provided Fox's first contacts with the family.[1] Some of Fox's early paintings from France, for example, *Autumn*, show parallels with the Harrisons' work in mood, technique and composition.

During these student years overseas, Fox met up with other artists from Australia: John Peter Russell (1859–1930) whose experimental works perhaps stimulated Fox towards greater freedom in colour; Charles Douglas Richardson (1853–1932) 'who showed [him] all over the Royal Academy schools'; John Longstaff (1862–1941); David Davies (1864–1939); George Pitt Morison (1861–1946); Bertram Mackennal (1863–1931); Walter Withers (1854–1914); Phil May (1864–1903); and Tudor St George Tucker.

The early fruits of Fox's summer painting trips show the artist's delight in sunshine and lively colours, and in working outdoors. The paintings reveal something of the rapture the young city student felt for the French countryside. The light, the small villages, the life of the peasant — everything in these surroundings was new to Fox. Yet he remained a watcher from another culture, painting the colour and light but not the hard grind of the daily rural existence. Only the worn face of the sitter in *Eighty-five years* (1891) shows his engagement with the ravages of time.

Fox's arrival in England in autumn 1890 coincided with the publication of the provocative *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* by James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) promoting the aesthetic of art for art's sake. Although Fox's art remained within the broad confines of a realist aesthetic, with visual observation central, he also loved the idea of the work of art carrying its own inner significance through artistic arrangement. One of the fascinating features of Fox's art is his capacity to unite his diverse experiences, fusing them into something of his own. Thus in England Fox found excitement in joining the artists' colony at St Ives which comprised landscape and figure painters who were inspired by Corot (1796–1875) and the Barbizon painters, Constable (1776–1837), Whistler, Bastien-Lepage, the *plein-air* figure painters of the neighbouring Newlyn school, and Victorian narrative art. Some of the artists were part of the New English Art Club, an exhibiting group representing progressive trends in British art and founded in reaction to the Royal Academy. Fox's friend, the Australian expatriate Louis Grier (1864–1920) who was socially involved with the St Ives Art Club, painted many Whistler-influenced night scenes. Fox's ambitious figure piece *Convalescent* (1890) shows his absorption of some of these trends — of Whistler in the muted blue–green palette, and a touch of Victorian sentiment in the pensive mood. However, the painting also demonstrates Fox's commitment to direct visual experience and love of colour, light and sensuous paint textures. These are constant qualities in his works.

A major force at this time in Europe was the art of the Spanish master Velasquez (1599–1660) which held immense sway over many international and Australian artists, including Hugh Ramsay (1877–1906), George Lambert (1873–1930), John Longstaff and Fox. Velasquez was considered a precursor of the aesthetic approach, largely through the writings of the influential Scottish author and painter R.A.M. Stevenson. Artists' reactions were diverse; they drew on Velasquez's technique and subtle tonal effects as much as his composition and content. When Fox travelled to Madrid in the summer of 1891 to pay his homage, he made large copies of *The topers* and *The tapestry weavers*. His later large-scale figure compositions owe some of their skill to his experience of the Spanish

artist. Fox's *Portrait of Mrs Pirani* (1893) shows a sensitive response to Velasquez's tonal range and silvery grays, a lone golden brooch offset by the black dress.

## Melbourne in the 1890s

Returning to Australia in October 1892, Phillips Fox responded to his environment with sensitive portraits and landscapes, experimenting with various light and atmospheric effects. The diverse elements he had absorbed overseas were expressed in different ways according to the subjects he painted and in response to local taste and the market: in his landscapes of the 1890s his aestheticism and Impressionist experience were strongest; in figure painting aestheticism, realism and Victorian sentiment were often apparent; in portraiture, where the taste of his patrons was more evident, Victorian sentiment is most prevalent, particularly in children's portraits. Importantly, through the example of his art and teaching practice, Fox extended and enriched Australian art, especially enlarging its contact with French Impressionism. *Wheatfield*, which he had painted at Giverny in 1892, reveals the extent of Fox's understanding of the high-keyed colours and broken brushstrokes which he was able to impart to fellow artists in Melbourne. Frederick McCubbin's (1855–1917) biographer, James S. MacDonald, later wrote:

> Fox and Tucker who had been studying in Paris returned in a manner somewhat like the return of Roberts, for they brought back new ideas which much impressed McCubbin and caused him to break away largely from the usual style.[2]

MacDonald recalled the 'refraction of colour theory brought back triumphantly from Paris by Fox and Tucker.'

Unlike many of his Australian contemporaries, Phillips Fox remained aloof from the nationalist current engulfing art and literature. Whatever the reasons, and these may be sought in the more cosmopolitan background of his family, his absence from the colonies during the climax of the heated nationalistic debates in the late 1880s and his artistic contacts overseas, Fox's art maintained a close affinity with the French Impressionists and Whistler. In his works nature is in a state of harmony, and people (mainly women) are lyrical images in light-filled settings. There is no parallel in his art for the working class ethos espoused by Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton (1867–1943) and many others — the labouring man in the outback, struggling with or reaping the rewards of nature. Fox's aesthetic was centred on artistic problems. He cared passionately about the standards of art in Australia and endeavoured to raise these by personal example, by teaching and by participation in the Victorian Artists' Society.

After his return to Australia Fox grew in confidence, attaining the first stage of artistic maturity in a familiar environment, working in close rapport with a circle of fellow artists and supported by his close-knit family. Initially, before moving to the Cromwell Buildings, Fox settled into a second-floor studio in the fashionable Grosvenor Chambers at 9 Collins Street, previously occupied by Tom Roberts, and had for neighbours the sculptor Percival Ball (1845–1900) and painters Clara Southern (1860–1940), Jane Sutherland (1853–1928), James C. Waite (1832–1921), Gordon Coutts (c.1869–1937), Tudor St George Tucker and the firm of painter–decorators, Paterson Brothers.[3] Renewed friendships with fellow artists from the Gallery School days deepened his sense of belonging. Fox revived contact with McCubbin, John Mather (1848–1916), Walter Withers, David Davies, Louis Abrahams (1852–1903) and others, including Longstaff who returned from England in 1895. Fox also remained in touch with Tom Roberts who was based in Sydney.

Local critics acknowledged Fox as an artist of status yet he sold relatively few works and none of the subject pictures he most cherished. One result of this was the foundation of the Melbourne School of Art which Fox and Tucker established in February or March 1893 in the Cromwell Buildings opposite the Bourke Street Post Office. From 1894 they also held a summer school in the charming old garden at 'Charterisville', near Heidelberg, which sloped down to the overgrown banks of the River Yarra. There students were introduced to *plein-air* and Impressionist techniques, mixing colour with white and painting rapidly on small panels to capture fleeting light effects. At first the *plein-air* excursions were weekend affairs, but from 1898 the students stayed for several weeks, painting in the open during the day and sketching each others' portraits at night. While Fox had his own weatherboard studio, the young women stayed,

accompanied by a chaperone, in the main stone house. Among the students were Ina Gregory (1874–1964), Mary Nanson (1877–1975), Lilla Reidy, Cristina Asquith Baker (1868–1960), Bertha Merfield, Henrietta Irving, Usula Foster, Fox's cousin Etta Phillips, Albert Enes, Ambrose Patterson (1877–1967) and Norman Carter (1875–1963).

The 1890s were exceptionally difficult years for artists in Melbourne. Fox made ends meet through teaching and portrait painting. His technical proficiency and ability to capture graceful images of his sitters gained him a considerable number of commissions. His clientele consisted of middle-class members of society, largely from legal and academic professions, and well-to-do business people. Fox's reputation in this genre rose considerably when, in 1894, his painting *Portrait of my cousin* (1893–4) won a gold medal at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français in Paris and acclaim the following year at the Royal Academy, London. Not surprisingly, the Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria expressed a wish to buy it but, probably for personal reasons, it remained in the artist's possession.

Fox's central work of the 1890s was his *Art students* (1895), one of the most original large-scaled figure paintings in Australia of the 1890s. It is a daring 'snapshot' composition, with figures seemingly unposed and abruptly cropped by the canvas edges. The faces are softly blurred to achieve a diffused daylight effect, and appear slightly flattened. The informal composition, flattened forms, cropping of the edges and ordinary subject show Fox addressing some of the principles of Impressionist compositions, as seen in early works of Degas and Renoir, though filtered through his English experiences. The imagery was drawn from Fox's local environment, it was contemporary, it contained all the ingredients for a desirable public gallery purchase. Predictably there was praise for the figure drawing, but reservation about the subject for its lack of interest and its treatment. In producing this painting, ambitiously scaled like Roberts' shearing pictures and McCubbin's pioneer subjects, Fox must have had a public gallery purchase in mind. Bernard Hall (1859–1935), Director of the National Gallery of Victoria at the time, was an admirer of Velasquez and Whistler and founder member of the New English Art Club (1886). He responded to the originality and quality of the work and for two years unsuccessfully urged the Trustees to buy it.[4] Again, when the painting was exhibited in Sydney in 1896 it was not bought, despite the generous acquisition of Australian works by the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

An interesting commentary on the Victorian Gallery's policy was its agreement in 1895 to purchase a landscape, also recommended by Hall — David Davies' *Moonrise* (1894). Indeed all the Gallery's early-1890s purchases of Australian works were landscapes. Perhaps this was a major reason for Fox's concentration on landscape in the later 1890s. Landscape painting was a genre to which Fox was deeply committed as a student in the early to mid-1880s — as seen in *Australian landscape* (1884) — and later as a participant in open air colonies in France and England. He painted many daylight scenes but sunset, twilight and moonrise became his favourite subjects. Painting of nocturnal scenes had been popular when Fox and Davies had resided at St Ives, and Whistler's exhibition in London in 1892, which Fox undoubtedly saw, remained in his memory, combining with an appreciation of Barbizon paintings and those of Corot. In Melbourne, aestheticism was in vogue following earlier painting in that mode by John Ford Paterson (1851–1912), Roberts and Streeton. The growth of the decorative, mood-evoking scenes was paralleled in Sydney by a new taste for *art nouveau* and symbolist painting, especially evident in the work of Blamire Young (1862–1935) and Sydney Long (1871–1955). The ideas infiltrated Australia through overseas magazines, especially *The Studio*. The new mood was also reflected in the nationalistically oriented *Bulletin* with the writing of such significant literary figures as A.G. Stephens, editor of the 'Red Page', the publication of poetry by Christopher Brennan and the celebration of French symbolist poets like Mallarmé and Verlaine. The trend towards mythological themes, the elegant and decorative, and the move away from naturalism are seen in Fox's art, parallelling the interests of Mackennal, Richardson, Roberts, Streeton and McCubbin.

Fox participated in certain trends of the 1890s, although not in a narrowly parochial way. He shared his preference for nocturnal scenes with other Melbourne painters of the *fin de siècle*, such as Davies and Withers; he had already painted similar scenes in France and England. To these artists, misty moonlit landscapes came to typify the Australian scene, contrasting with Sydney-siders' celebration of the land of the sunny south. In Fox's landscapes, although

colours are modulated and tonal, they read strongly as colours, as moist low-pitched blues and greens. A sense of the decorative runs through Fox's nocturnes, forming exquisite emerald harmonies as seen in *Moonrise, Heidelberg* (1900).

For an artist of Fox's creativity, the painting of portraits and landscapes was a limiting experience. Although subject painting was his special gift, works such as *The Knitter, Convalescent,* and *Art students* remained unsold. The very country which had urged its artists to study abroad, to match overseas artists and win placement at the Paris Salons and the Royal Academy in London, now refused to purchase the large figure compositions upon which such achievement was based. Even in portraiture, patronage was running out. '... Probably there is not room yet awhile in Australia for two portrait-painters of the conspicuous ability of Mr Fox and Mr Longstaff ...', wrote the critic of *Table Talk* (18 October 1900, p.5). However, Fox's ability as an academic painter and his capacity for figure drawing found acknowledgment in 1901 when he was given the commission to depict the momentous event of Captain Cook's stepping ashore on the continent of Australia. (Fox shared the commission with Longstaff whose directive was to paint the *Arrival of Burke and Wills at Cooper's Creek in 1861*.) This major commission, celebrating the advent of Federation and funded by the National Gallery of Victoria's Gilbee Bequest, stipulated that the painting be executed overseas. The painting of *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770* took Fox overseas in March 1901, initiating his years of expatriatism. Ironically, the only nationalistic work Fox ever produced helped him to leave the country whose narrow parochialism failed to accept the art which he most valued.

## Return Overseas

Renewed contact with British and French art and the goal of different markets signalled a change in Fox's attitude, resulting in an increasingly sophisticated and decorative approach. At first, following intense research into the historical accuracy of site and costumes, Fox devoted himself entirely to the completion of *The Landing of Captain Cook,* which he painted at St Ives and exhibited in Streeton's London studio in 1902 where it was much admired by fellow artists. Between 1903 and 1905 Fox attempted to establish his reputation in London by exhibiting at the Royal Academy and painted portraits for income. He frequently crossed the channel, visiting Paris and painting rural scenes in the countryside around Chartres,[5] where he probably stayed with the peasant family of Père Rivart. The fresh *plein-air* studies crystallised into two subject paintings — *The harvest field* (1905), a picture of peasants at work in late afternoon sun, and *Père Rivart with his granddaughter* (1906), a gentler image of an old peasant's affection for his grandchild. These were Fox's last essays on the theme of the European peasant. In the same years he was evolving images of elegant life. In his lovely painting *Woodland nymphs* (1904), two fashionably attired city women linger in a sylvan glade, still evoking a pensive arcadian mood reminiscent of Fox's earlier renditions of autumn scenes. Painted slightly later, the *Al fresco* (c.1905), no longer rustic, is a new departure, with its bright colours, elegant figures and refined ambience.

During Fox's years of absence in Australia, the art world of Paris and London had changed. In Paris the two most exciting manifestations were the flowering of the *art nouveau* style and the dominance of decorative colour. On his first trip to Paris in 1887 Fox had glimpsed the rising landmark of the Eiffel Tower. Conspicuous on his second visit were Hector Guimard's bold *art nouveau* metro stations with their sinuous lines and entwined plant-like forms. Other public structures were equally striking expressions of the style, including the new exhibition venue, the Grand Palais (established 1900). Paris was a rich source of inspiration for Fox and eventually it became his second home. Interest in colour and light led him to a more intense dialogue with French Impressionist art, particularly the 1860s and 1870s works of Renoir (1841–1919) and Monet (1840–1926), by then widely accessible. The Caillebotte collection of Impressionist works in the Luxembourg Gallery was on constant display in Paris from the mid-1890s. A painting like Monet's *Luncheon* (1872) must have fascinated Fox, sparking off ideas for his *déjeuner* paintings, *Al fresco* (c.1905) and *The arbour* (1910). He was also intrigued by the work of the *intimiste* painters, Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) and Edouard Vuillard (1868–1940), whose imagery at the turn of the century had become focused on the domestic realm. Their figures, in the intimate spaces of their surroundings (seated at the table, lingering in boudoirs or enclosed sunny gardens, or simply absorbed in silent contemplation) are

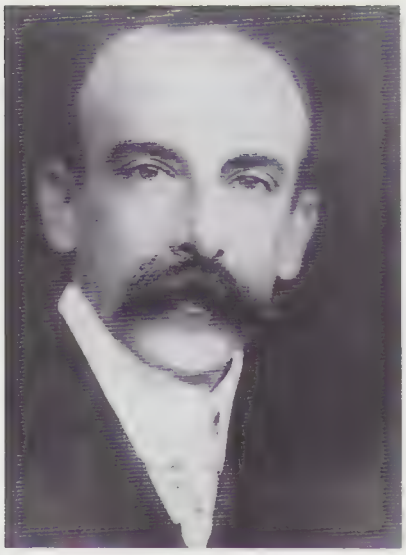
removed from the disturbances of the outer world. The artists' colours and their subjects were inherited from the Impressionist painters and, decorative and mood-setting, the paintings are imbued with a sense of intimacy. Fox felt deep empathy with such works. Some of the symbolist features were also present in Whistler's art, which continued to fascinate him.

The Edwardian age in France and England brought a revival of aristocratic 18th-century styles. In England, John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), Wilson Steer (1860–1942), Charles Furse (1868–1904) and others looked back to Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) and Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). Reflecting something of this milieu, Fox's *Portrait of a young girl* (1906) elevates the sitter, painting her from a low viewpoint against clouds and imbuing her with an air of distinction. In France, the Rococo revival blended with *art nouveau*, celebrating elegance and refinement. Both styles favoured asymmetry, with undulating lines used to bind the composition, but *art nouveau* was perhaps more ornamental and decorative in intent. Although Fox was not an *art nouveau* painter, his work absorbed something of its atmosphere: in *The ferry* (1910–11) the sinuous line and wave-like rhythm link the figures; in *Al fresco* and *The arbour* the pattern of the vine trellis shows Fox drawing on aspects of this style. He responded to varied artistic sources when these harmonised with his aim — to evoke a sense of optimism and wellbeing. Fox relinquished his earlier preference for compositions with a strong vertical emphasis, as seen in *Art students* (1895), in favour of soft curves which engender a sense of grace and ease. The change in style coincided with his new ideal of femininity, replete with graciousness. The figures inhabiting Fox's paintings also reveal a social shift to an upper-class bourgeoisie, in line with portrayals by Rupert Bunny and other painters showing at the Salon. The Salon, above all, was an important barometer of taste for the expatriate painter. Prospective patrons would identify with such a social stratum. Fox's *A love story* (1903), an early manifestation of his new ideal of womanhood, was first exibited in Australia but totally repainted overseas. The new version was displayed in 1903 at the Royal Academy and then at the Paris New Salon. In the late 1890s in Australia, Fox had already painted women of marked elegance, as testified by the lovely painting (now gravely damaged by mould) *Lady in black* (1900) and the early version of *A love story*, which survives only through descriptions in press reviews. But the later version, with its curving lines and flowing drapery enveloping the figure, introduces new refinement. Fox's great gift was to impart an air of naturalness, as if the graciousness emanated from within the young woman absorbed in reading in the warmth of a sunny afternoon. The figure also projects the sense of human nearness, an *intimisme*, that would characterise Fox's later work.

About the time he repainted *A love story* Fox met his future wife, a charming and sophisticated English woman from an educated middle-class family, with ambitions to be a painter matching his own. Ethel Carrick (1872–1952), then in her early thirties, possessed an exceptionally forceful personality which complemented her husband's more gentle and shy disposition. Phillips Fox at this time was nearly forty. After their marriage in May 1905 the couple moved to Paris and set up home at 65 Boulevard Arago, near the Luxembourg Gardens, in an enclave of artists' studio-apartments. In the privacy of their small arboured garden, which provided bright flowers, verdure and filtered sunlight, they entertained and painted many of their works.

Between 1906 and 1913, the couple undertook painting trips to the beach resorts of northern France, such as Trouville, where Fox painted studies for *The ferry* (1910–11), as well as Venice (where they had spent their honeymoon), which resulted in such delightful works as *St Mark's, Venice* (1907). They went to other parts of Italy, the south of France, Spain and north Africa. For Fox, Morocco and Algeria were revelations of light and high-keyed colour. Paint flowed more fluently from his brush than before, but like many Western artist–visitors, he had little grasp of the alien civilisation. The scenes depict public places — streets and markets — and, a curiosity to Fox, a Moslem procession; one canvas is a tiny exquisite painting of a head of a Moroccan girl. Many of these works are small panels, painted rapidly on the spot, with areas of the blond wood left unpainted to suggest the brightness of the light.

This phase of Fox's art, from around the time of his marriage in 1905 until 1913, saw him develop a range of favourite subjects. The most pervasive was the theme of motherhood. The concept of motherhood as a desirable goal for all women had wide social currency in the patriarchal societies of Britain and Australia — in medical journals, political forums and general propaganda — to ensure population growth,



E. Phillips Fox

Ethel Carrick Fox

healthy offspring and the perpetuation of the race. Motherhood was celebrated, idealised and encouraged. It was a wide-reaching theme in literature and art, among such diverse groups as the Impressionist painters, symbolists and realists. Images of motherhood proliferated in the Salons and the Royal Academy. The theme had a personal significance for Fox, relating back to his own experiences of family life where Mother was the core of the family — generous, sharing, embodying the values of civility. His philosophy of life was one of social harmony in which the family was bonded through the mother. In his paintings the male figure is secondary or simply absent. In *Bathing hour* (c.1909) mother and child dominate the picture, the privacy of their relationship isolated from the jolly holiday-makers on the beachfront. His painting *Motherhood* (1908), which won Fox full membership in the New Salon in 1910, revolves totally around the mother as the nucleus of family. Fox had no children of his own but his work was inspired by the members of his brother David's family. The idea for *Motherhood* germinated during the months of 1908 when Fox had returned to Australia and painted many fond sketches in his brother's garden in Malvern. *The arbour* (1910), infused with serenity and contentment, grew from the same context and his studies of some members of the family at home in Malvern. The canvas was painted later in Paris, in Fox's garden. In all these works motherhood is idealised. The sun-saturated colours and the garden setting enhance the domesticity. In *The lesson* (1912), mother and child share a story in an interior setting, with the sun streaming in through the window in a shower of coloured light.

Fox's concept of the feminine pervades his art. The idealised women in his paintings are rendered taller, more elegant, dressed in attires of Fox's choosing, their features more regular, the colour of their hair often altered to Fox's favourite auburn. There are paintings of single women in gardens amidst flowers, nudes painted in dappled light or indoors, as seen in one of Fox's finest nude depictions, *Resting* (c.1910–11) where a golden-bodied woman with auburn hair is placed in a setting of lavenders and cool green. There are women in contemplation in the private spaces of their rooms, with Fox's favourite device, light seeping through gauze curtains, forming a coloured pattern. Among his favourite models was the auburn-haired Edith Anderson (1878–1961), later Mrs Penleigh Boyd, who inspired some of Fox's best work. Few of these paintings of women are straight portraits: the borderline between the subject picture and the portrait blurs; the titles, such as *The green parasol* and *The muslin dress*, preserve the sitters' anonymity.

The Paris period was one of the most productive and creative in Fox's career. Fox aspired to gain recognition with large Salon and Royal Academy paintings, but at the same time he painted exquisite works on a small scale: boulevards; churches; sociable pictures of the beachfront, with striped bathing boxes and colourful crowds; children playing along the

waterline and in the Luxembourg gardens; colonnaded cloisters with oleanders blooming outside; nocturnal views of Venice, Spain and France.

## Final Years

Returning to Melbourne in 1913, at a time when sales abroad were low but a painting boom was under way in Australia, Fox held a number of exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney. His favourite painting site in Australia became the coastline and harbour inlets of Sydney: his love of Manly and the sea is captured in *The green wave* (c.1914); *Cremorne Point* (c.1914), with sails like white butterflies flitting over the water, the headland animated with colourful strollers and painted with great freshness, is one of his most satisfying late landscapes. In these last years in Australia, Fox was called upon to produce many more traditional portraits of well-known people, including the Deakin and Brookes families, Henry Gyles Turner, doctors and academics, and he painted portraits of his friends, including Marshall-Hall.

In 1914 Fox and his wife visited Tahiti but war broke out and they returned to Melbourne where they participated in generous fundraising activities for the Red Cross. Phillips Fox died soon after, on 8 October 1915, after delaying hospitalisation in order to complete his final work, a portrait of Lord Forrest in state regalia. Fox's niece Mrs Louise Porker recalled that at his funeral, as 'a tribute to his love of colour … masses of coloured flowers were used in the wreaths' instead of the customary 'dead white or white and purple' — an inspired homage paid to Philips Fox by his friends and the artistic community.[6]

In the world in which Fox had lived, richness and elegance were celebrated by the Edwardian painters, while social inequalities and extreme poverty were widespread. Women were portrayed as elegant, lavishly clothed creatures, while suffragettes were fighting for women's right to vote. There were dynamic changes in science and industry within societies ridden with disjunctions and dislocations. In art, Matisse and Picasso were painting; the radical Autumn Salon of 1905 brought before the public the Fauves. In London the Post Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912 were organised by the art critic Roger Fry, and the Futurist concerns with the dynamism of modern life made their Paris and London appearance in 1912. Yet Fox's art avoids confrontation with these crucial moments in 20th-century life and art. It is important to recognise that he consciously chose not to address them. He sought to preserve the values and qualities he saw as enduring, many of which disappeared with the cataclysmic events of World War I.

## Notes

1 A. Rae, 'An Old House at Étaples', *Australasian*, 9 May 1891, p. 907. I am indebted to Jane Clark for this reference.

2 Lothian Papers, LaTrobe Library, Box 31. I thank Leigh Astbury for the reference.

3 Sands and MacDougall, *Melbourne Directory*, 1892–96.

4 B. Hall to the Trustees, 25 November 1896, Lindsay Bernard Hall Papers, National Gallery of Australia Research Library 3BH304.

5 For Fox's stay near Chartres see *British Australasian*, 22 December 1904, p. 1706. I owe thanks to Margaret Vine for the reference. See also *Morning Post* (London), 10 May 1904. My thanks to Mary Eagle for this source.

6 Mrs Louise Porker to the author, 5 Burke Street, Kerang, undated letter [1970].

# Family Memories

## Leonard Fox

I was only ten years old when my Uncle Mannie — the artist E. Phillips Fox — died in 1915, but I can still remember his personal warmth and the extent to which this was reciprocated by members of the Fox and Phillips families. They all regarded him with very deep affection. This was partly due to the fame he had won in the art world, but it was also due to his personal charm, his never-failing friendliness and warmth.

He was particularly fond of children. When I asked my younger sister Bonnie some years ago for her memories of Uncle Mannie, she recalled the Sunday afternoon family gatherings at the Malvern home of the artist's mother Rosetta — 'Grannie' as we knew her — a warm and gracious woman who had reared her large family in an atmosphere of kindliness and love. Every week at these gatherings of the grandchildren there used to be a competition to see which child could collect the most Moreton Bay figs from beneath the big tree on the front lawn. Bonnie, being the youngest and smallest, regularly came last. But one Sunday Uncle Mannie was there; he took part and tipped all his figs in Bonnie's bag. For once she won the prize of the most red and white peppermints!

My elder sister Louise, when asked for her memories, recalled the period in 1908 when she was seven years old and Uncle Mannie and his wife used to come and paint at our Malvern home:

> As a child I loved having him in and out of our house. He was never too busy to talk and play with us, or set us up with paper, charcoal and pieces of fresh bread to roll into little balls to use as erasers … Later, when he lived in Melbourne shortly before his death, I saw him at several exhibitions and gatherings, and it was his quiet manner and humility that made me admire him so — I am sure he never thought of himself as great.

Uncle Mannie made a number of sketches of my mother, my sisters and myself which he took back to Paris and used in some of the larger works he painted there; in this way and in others he kept in close touch with his family even when abroad.

His personal charm, his love of children, and his feeling for the happiness of family gatherings — these are to be seen in many of his paintings.

Fox's family was Jewish, but it was one that was closely linked with the surrounding community in many ways. His mother's father, Rev. Solomon Phillips, had been a leading member of the early Sydney synagogue and was later recalled from Melbourne to Sydney to act, for a number of years, as minister of the breakaway Macquarie Street congregation. But Solomon Phillips was also a man of broad interests. These ranged from music and business activities to participation in the local Parramatta Benevolent and Agricultural Societies in the 1840s, and also in the meetings which agitated for greater democracy in the young colony. This interest in cultural activities and community affairs was also evidenced by a number of Solomon Phillips' descendants, including his eldest son P.D. Phillips, a prominent lawyer and Shakespearean scholar, and a number of men and women in later generations, including Dr Marion Phillips MP who became a leading member of the British Labour Party.

P.D. Phillips had published *The Jew in English Literature*, a booklet in which he advocated that Australian Jews, to win the full respect of the community, should concentrate on

> those sciences, those arts, which are the best products, the crowning flowers of civilisation. We will assist in the making of wise and just laws, in the promotion of charity, in the amelioration of social conditions. We will aid you to elevate, to beautify, to refine existence.

While some members of the Phillips family

maintained an Orthodox religious outlook, the main family emphasis was on what may be seen as the humanist side of the Jewish tradition: the love of scholarship and cultural and social activities. This meant that when the young Mannie displayed artistic abilities, he was given the moral and financial support of his whole family. In particular, his two eldest brothers, Joel and Phil, gave him the financial support which enabled him to attend the Melbourne National Gallery Art School and, later, to go abroad to study painting in France and England. It also meant that Mannie grew up feeling himself not only a member of the Fox and Phillips families, but also a member of the wider human family.

When in later life I began to write down the memories of my mother and other people about Phillips Fox, I came across considerable evidence of the warm friendliness of his character extending far beyond the confines of his family. When working in Sydney in 1959, I noticed that the catalogue of an exhibition held by 84-year-old artist Norman Carter referred to Phillips Fox as 'a man and artist whose memory he [Norman Carter] has always cherished.' When I introduced myself to Carter he told me that Fox had not only been his art teacher in his early days but had befriended him when he had been 'both hard up financially and mentally depressed', and that this friendship and instruction had been decisive factors in helping him to win through the difficulties of the 1890s.

Later, I had a letter from David Heysen, son of the artist Hans Heysen, stating that it was Phillips Fox who 'suggested and managed his [Hans Heysen's] 1908 very successful exhibition in Melbourne.' Again, James MacDonald in his book *The Landscapes of Penleigh Boyd* tells how when Boyd made Paris his home in 1910:

> He took a studio in the Boulevard Arago, where for a neighbour he had the late E.P. Fox, a sound and accomplished painter, by whose friendly and useful criticism Boyd greatly benefited. In this respect he is only one of many Australians whom this kindly, gifted artist so freely and unobtrusively helped.

Down the years I have also met a number of people who had not met Fox personally, but who spoke of the warmth of his personality experienced through his paintings. Among these was the artist Roland Wakelin, who had been prominent in the early modern movement. When I visited him in his Double Bay home in 1968, he was still actively painting at the age of 81. Wakelin told me that Fox's 1913 Sydney exhibition made a great impression on him: 'We'd never seen colour like that here before.'

In the 1940s and 1950s there had been a tendency on the part of some critics to see Fox as an expatriate who had lost touch with the Australian art world. Wakelin's statement, taken together with other evidence, indicates that from his early teaching days in the 1890s until well into this century Fox has been an important part of the national art scene. It has been good to see, in recent years, the growing recognition of this fact, and members of his family would like to express their appreciation of all those who have been responsible. James Mollison, Ruth Zubans, Margaret Rich and others deserve mention, and also Ruth Faerber, who in the *Australian Jewish Times* wrote of Fox's 'tenacity and devotion', adding: 'To stand alone is never comfortable but in those days it was heroic.'

The use of the word 'heroic' may surprise some readers in view of the high prices that are paid nowadays for paintings. It is easy, for instance, to look at Fox's 1895 painting *Art students* and imagine that the artist must have received a big sum of money when he sold it. The fact is that Fox was unable to sell this painting while he was alive, even after he had won fame at home and abroad. I can remember my mother telling me that when Uncle Mannie was awarded (equally with John Longstaff) the Gilbee Bequest commission in 1900 and was paid a considerable sum to enable him to travel to London, he did not have a bank account in which to put the money. He had never had enough money to justify opening an account.

It was a tragedy for all who knew him when Emanuel Phillips Fox died of cancer in 1915 at the early age of 50. Eighty years later, it is good to see many signs that his paintings — on book covers, greeting cards and other forms of reproduction as well as in galleries — are appreciated by younger generations. Their comments indicate that they find in the paintings not only a love of light and colour, but also a love of beauty, of women and children, of family warmth, of humanity. It is good, too, to remember what Sir Lionel Lindsay wrote of him shortly after his death:

> Of all the artists I have known Fox seems the

purest devotee to whom art was everything and whose faith in it never faltered. He had often lived and worked upon a couple of francs a day, and when fortune favoured him, the feast he regaled himself with was 'models to paint'. He painted what was in him, having no ability, fortunately, to commercialise his art, and I cannot recall a work by him that smelt of the pot. That, after all, is success in life, and Phillips Fox can rest easily in his grave, secure in the knowledge that he gave the best that was in him to the art he loved.

# Chronology

**1865** Born 12 March Fitzroy, Victoria.

**1878–86** Attends National Gallery School, Victoria under O.R. Campbell and G.F. Folingsby.
Awarded landscape prize at National Gallery student exhibitions in 1884 and 1886.

**1887** February: leaves for London. In May goes to Paris; enrols at the Académie Julian.
Spends summer at the artists' colony at Étaples, Pas de Calais, where he returns in 1890.

**1887–89** Studies at the Académie Julian under William Bouguereau and Tony Robert-Fleury; wins prizes for drawing and painting.

**1889** Enrols in Gérôme's atelier at the École des Beaux-Arts; wins premier *prix d'atelier.*
Attends classes of the American painter and teacher Thomas Alexander Harrison.
Spends summer and autumn at Le Pouldu, Finistère, in Brittany.

**1890** Exhibits first two works at the *Salon de la Société des Artistes Français* (Old Salon).
August: travels to England. After a brief visit to London joins the artists' colony at St Ives in Cornwall. Exhibits with the Cornish artists at Dowdeswell's, London. Shows one work in the *8th Exhibition of Institute of Painters in Oil Colours* in Picadilly.

**1891** Exhibits two works at the *Salon de la Société des Artistes Français.*
July: travels to Spain; in Madrid studies and copies works by Velasquez.
In 1891 or 1892 paints with George Pitt Morison at Cernay-la-Ville, south-west of Paris and at Pontoise.

**1892** Visits Giverny and paints landscapes.
Exhibits one work at the Glasgow Institute of Art.
October: returns to Melbourne.
December: solo exhibition in Melbourne; National Gallery of Victoria purchases Fox's copy of Velasquez's *The topers.*

**1893** With Tudor St George Tucker establishes Melbourne School of Art at the Cromwell Buildings, Bourke Street, Melbourne.
Begins to exhibit regularly at the Victorian Artists' Society, Melbourne; council member of the Society until 1900.

**1894** Wins 3rd-class gold medal at the Paris Salon with *Portrait of my cousin.*
With Tucker commences Summer School at 'Charterisville' near Heidelberg.

**1895** Exhibits *Portrait of my cousin* at the Royal Academy.

**1896** Exhibits with The Society of Artists, Sydney.

**1898** Sends five works to the *Exhibition of Australian Art* in London held at Grafton Gallery.
Exhibits at the *Federal Exhibition* organised by South Australian Society of Artists; sends works to the Federal Exhibitions again in 1901 and 1908.

First two original works purchased by public galleries — Art Gallery of South Australia and Art Gallery of New South Wales.

**1900** Solo exhibitions: at the Old Court Studio, Swanston Street in Melbourne in October; at the Society of Artists' Vickery Chambers in Sydney in December.

**1901** Shows at *The Commonwealth Exhibition of Australian Art*, Sydney, in January and *The Fourth Federal Exhibition* in Adelaide in November. Works purchased by Art Gallery of New South Wales. Exhibits at the *Golden Jubilee Exhibition* in Bendigo. Receives commission to paint *The Landing of Captain Cook* and in March leaves for England.

**1901–02** At St Ives, Cornwall; in 1902 moves to London.

**1902** Sends one work to the *Exhibition of British Colonial Art* in Picadilly in June. Exhibits several works with *The Landing of Captain Cook* in Streeton's studio in Hampstead.

**1903–04** From 1903 to 1912 exhibits at Royal Academy. Resides in London. Spends summers painting in France. Between 1903 and 1905 shows works in his studio at 10 Abbey Road, St John's Wood.

**1904** Exhibits at the Grafton Gallery summer show in May. Shows six works with the Felix Art Club in November 1904.

**1905** May: marries the English artist Ethel Carrick and settles in Paris at 65 Boulevard Arago in Montparnasse. Exhibits one work with the Royal Society of Portrait Painters in London.

**1906** Begins to exhibit at the *Salon de la Société des Beaux Arts* (New Salon); continues until 1912. Sends one work to Liverpool Walker Art Gallery's *36th Autumn Exhibition of Modern Art.*

**1906–07** Travels in France (Normandy and the environs of Paris) and Italy, spending the spring of 1907 in Venice.

**1907** Elected Associate of the New Salon with his painting *Al Fresco.*

**1908** February to end of August in Australia. Solo exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney. Paints in both places. Shows three works with the Royal Art Society, Sydney. Visits Adelaide and en route to France stops by in Perth.

**1909** Sends two works to Birmingham Royal Society of Artists' *83rd Autumn Exhibition.*

**1910** Elected Sociétaire at the New Salon with *Motherhood.* Sends *Motherhood* to Victorian Artists' Society exhibition in October.

**1909–11** Travels to seaside resorts in France: St Malô, Trouville, Deauville, Dinard, Royan.

**1911** February: a six-week painting trip to Algiers and Tangiers. Returns to Paris via picturesque sites in Spain (Cordova, Granada, Cadiz, etc.) and the south of France. Exhibits five works at the Liverpool Walker Art Gallery's *41st Autumn Exhibition of Modern Art* including a work from his Algerian trip.

**1912** Sends one work to Liverpool Walker Art Gallery's *42nd Autumn Exhibition of Modern Art.* Shows two works at *Salon d'Automne;* six works with the Société Internationale de Peinture et de Sculpture at Georges Galerie Petit.

**1913** Paints in South of France. Shows sixteen works with the Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français in Paris in February. March: returns to Australia. Exhibits in Melbourne and Sydney. Portrait commissions of eminent Australians 1913–15.

**1914** Paints in Sydney around the Harbour

and at Stanwell Park. Travels to Tasmania.
Together with Ethel Carrick Fox exhibits in Melbourne in May.
Visits Tahiti. Returns to Melbourne in October after outbreak of war.
Participates in the war effort to raise funds for the Red Cross.

**1915** Continues portrait commissions.
March: participates in the Red Cross Australian Artists' War Fund exhibition.
October: exhibits with the Australian Art Association, Melbourne.
Takes ill and dies of cancer 8 October at St Evin's Hospital, Melbourne. Buried in the Anglican section at Brighton cemetery, Melbourne.

## 1 *Australian landscape* 1884

oil on canvas
41.5 x 52.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E.P. Fox / 84
Private collection, Adelaide

This painting, one of Fox's earliest surviving landscapes, shows his early response to light-filled scenes and a feeling for atmosphere. The painting was exhibited at the National Gallery School exhibition in 1884. Fox was awarded a prize in the Gallery Students' exhibitions of both 1884 and 1886. He went on sketching trips with other students and admired Buvelot's landscapes.

## 2 *Autumn* 1889

oil on canvas
81.6 x 116.5 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. P. Fox / 89
Private collection

*Autumn* and the now damaged *The knitter* were the two paintings with which Fox made his debut at the Paris Salon in 1890. When *Autumn* was exhibited in Melbourne soon after, it was highly praised.

Painted in the region of Finistère in Brittany, France, from open air studies, it is an evocative depiction of autumn mists and russet tones with a lone figure humanising the scene. Associated with the passing of human life, the theme of autumn was a favourite subject at the end of the century. Among other painters in Fox's circle, Thomas Alexander Harrison's brother Lowell Birge Harrison and the latter's wife, the Australian artist Eleanor Ritchie Harrison, both painted the subject.

## 3 *La religieuse* (c.1889–90)

oil on canvas
41.0 x 32.2 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of the artist's nephew, Len Fox, in memory of his mother, Irene Fox, 1984

Fox was enchanted with the French countryside and its people. In contrast to his student work in Melbourne, here bright colour and prominent brushwork suggest his early response to French Impressionism. In the choice of subject — a young peasant woman dressed for a religious ritual — Fox shared the interest of a wide international circle of *plein-air* artists working in France who were fascinated by French regional customs.

Fox painted at least three variants on the theme of the communicant. The second of these, *Peasant girl,* is also included in the exhibition (see 4).

The painting was known in the family as *La Religieuse,* but according to the *Age* (6 December 1892, p. 6) it could have been *Sunlight effect.*

The painting was shown in Fox's solo exhibition in Melbourne, December 1892.

## 4 *Peasant girl* (c.1889–90)

oil on canvas
27.3 x 22.0 cm
Private collection

*Peasant girl* shows a young woman, her head in profile demurely bent, with dappled light playing over the headdress. Like *Autumn* and *La religieuse* this work was probably painted at Le Pouldu in Brittany, about the same time or perhaps a little later. The bright yellow and sage green are similar to the colours Fox used for his other early Salon painting, *The knitter* (1889).

## 5 *Market place, Étaples* 1890

oil on canvas
22.0 x 32.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox / Etaples / 90
Private collection, Benalla, Victoria

This is the only painting that can be traced with certainty to Fox's work at Étaples, a popular painting colony for many French and foreign artists during the late 19th century. The attraction of Étaples, on the estuary of the River Canche in northern France, was its 'simple' fishing and marketing community, cheap models, inexpensive living and accessibility by rail and boat.

Fox spent his first summer there in 1887 and, having enjoyed his stay, returned in 1890 when he painted this small scene. Fox's friend Tucker also painted there, as did other Australian artists, including Longstaff, Iso Rae, Bunny, Edward Officer and James Quinn. It was on his first visit that he met the Harrison family of painters; Birge Harrison had a studio there.

Fox loved painting market scenes and this small work vividly captures the bustle and colour which he found so exciting. It was one of the two market scenes of Étaples Fox showed in his 1892 exhibition in Melbourne.

## 6 *Study of a peasant woman leaning on a stick* (c.1889–92)

oil on wood panel
22.0 x 15.9 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

## 7 *Study of a peasant woman in three different poses* (c.1890)

oil on wood panel
15.9 x 21.6 cm
Private collection

## 8 *Convalescent* 1890

oil on canvas
97.5 x 78.5 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. P. Fox 90 / St Ives
The Holmes à Court Collection, Perth

Painted several months after Fox's arrival at the artists' colony at St Ives, Cornwall, this major painting shows developments in Fox's art in response to Whistler's work. The mood is also suggestive of Victorian narrative art. Fox had always been intrigued by light effects and here the challenge was to suggest the reflected light of a fireplace on the texture of skin and garments. When exhibited in Australia in 1892 the painting was popular and praised for its technique and sentiment. It is the first large-scale work that shows a change from Fox's French-inspired clear palette to subdued colour harmonies. Fox showed the painting at Dowdeswell's Gallery in London in 1890 and at the Old Salon in Paris in 1891.

## 9 *Eighty-five years* 1891

oil on canvas
35.4 x 29.3 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. P. Fox 1891
Art Gallery of South Australia
M.J.M. Carter Collection, 1987

This subject, unusual among Fox's early work, demonstrates his capacity for the sensitive portrayal of old age. Fox wrote to his mother from Le Pouldu in October 1889 that he had 'an idea' of painting an old peasant woman, but found it a difficult subject. This picture was painted two years later in 1891, probably after his visit to Madrid and study of Velasquez's work. *Eighty-five years* shows a woman with a lined face and sunken cheeks, without a trace of idealisation, yet respecting the sitter's privacy. Critics in Melbourne stressed its realism and drew attention to Fox's ability to vary his mode of expression to fit the subject.

## 10 *Wheatfield* 1892

oil on canvas
32.0 x 44.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox/ Giverny / 92 /Replica
Private collection, Benalla, Victoria

Fox painted *Wheatfield* in Giverny, where Monet lived at the time. Attracted by Monet's presence he probably went there with some of his American friends. The subject is one made famous by Monet. But Fox, preferring a wider view, did not focus on the grain stacks. This painting is important in showing Fox's interest in applying colour in small broken brushstrokes with the ricks casting complementary blue shadows. He obviously valued this work; he painted at least two replicas of it. The original was exhibited in his Melbourne exhibition in December 1892 together with five other landscapes painted at Giverny, some of them in moonlight. The painting of replicas was part of 19th-century academic practice, and there are many instances of Fox replicating his works.

## 11 *Portrait of Mrs Pirani* 1893

oil on canvas
102.2 x 75.6 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. P. Fox / Oct. 93
Private collection, Canberra

Abigail Davis (1821–97) was the daughter of a Jewish 'Optician and Maths Instrument Manufacturer' of Leeds. After her marriage to James C. Pirani in 1842, the couple moved to Melbourne in 1858 where James Pirani was manager of a successful clothing and outfitting business.*

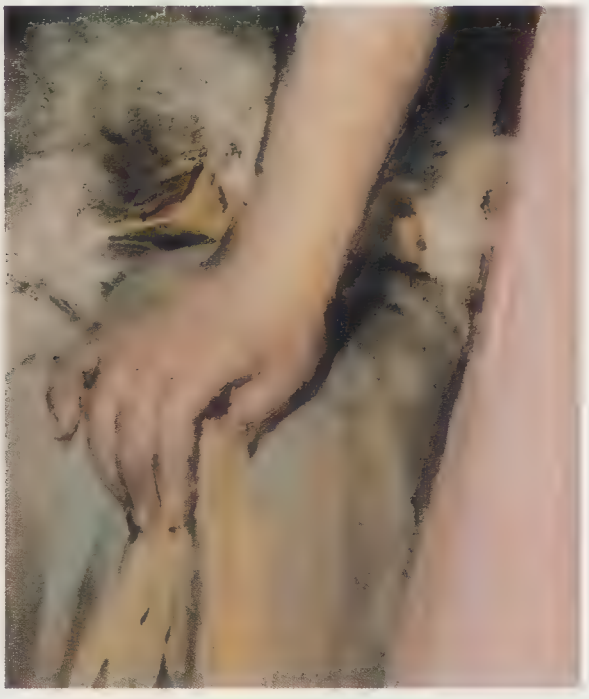
Painted by Fox soon after his return to Australia, the portrait conveys a sensitive response to an elderly sitter. The artist has captured her inner dignity and a sense of vulnerability. In colour scheme and technique the work shows fruitful study of Velasquez: the flesh tones, the silvery hair wonderfully offset by the dark dress, the use of the handkerchief and the glint of a sole piece of jewellery — all reflect homage to the Spanish master. In contrast to the portrait of the youthful Lottie (see 12), this is an understated image yet offers a convincing interpretation of a gracious and strong woman. Fox exhibited the portrait at the Victorian Artists' Society annual exhibition in October 1894.

* Barbara Falk, *No Other Home*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1988, p.48

## 12 *Portrait of my cousin* 1893–94

oil on canvas
206.0 x 92.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: ... (indistinct) November / Emanuel P. Fox. / Jany 94; overpainted: E. Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1925

With this painting Fox was awarded a third-class gold medal at the Paris Salon in 1894, the first to an Australian artist. The sitter was his cousin Lottie Phillips to whom he was romantically attached; however, marriage was discouraged. The full-length portrait is an ambitious work, with Lottie in a pale pink empire dress shown standing on a fur rug and reflected in a shadowed mirror on the right. The pose, the fur rug and the mirror reflection call to mind Whistler's paintings that Fox had seen in London in 1892. But Fox's painting is more forthright in its naturalism and is conceived as a more traditional portrait. Undoubtedly at the back of his mind were images of portraits by Gainsborough and Reynolds, but above all we see a direct response to his graceful subject.



## 13 *The orphan* 1895

oil on canvas
54.0 x 43.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / 95
The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art

This fine portrait shows Fox's sympathy for the sitter, Marion Barrett (née Rennick, 1861–1939), whom he knew well and to whom he was distantly related through his brother Joel's marriage. She was a fellow exhibitor at the Victorian Artists' Society and her husband Dr James Barrett was a patron of the arts. The elegance of the silhouette and the colour scheme indicate the influence of Whistler's art. One of Foxs interesting techniques — new within the context of Australian art — was the slightly blurred effect, suggestive of a subtle atmosphere, mood and daylight. Fox chose this as one of his works for the important Grafton Gallery *Exhibition of Australian Art* in London in 1898 and showed it at the Victorian Artists' Society exhibition held at the National Gallery of Victoria the same year. The title, inscribed on the reverse of the work, seems a curious choice. Later, in 1913 or 1914, Fox painted a large-scale, full-length portrait of Marion Barrett, now in Geelong Art Gallery, and a portrait of her husband.

## 14 *Adelaide, daughter of Professor Tucker* 1895

oil on canvas
109.2 x 61.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox / Dec 95
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased, 1898

Adelaide Tucker was the daughter of the Professor of Classics at the University of Melbourne. Fox had met Professor Tucker on the voyage out from London, when they were fellow passengers on board the ship *Orizaba*. Shortly after their arrival in Melbourne Fox painted a portrait of him in academic robes and the commission for his daughter followed. Admired by Tom Roberts, the painting of the little girl dressed in a cowl and gathered silk costume was a great favourite with the public and critics. It was exhibited several times in 1896, on one occasion with a group of other children's portraits in Fox's studio.

The virtuoso technique and wistful mood ensured commissions for a number of children's portraits. This was another of Fox's works chosen for the Grafton Gallery exhibition in London. It was one of the first two paintings by Fox acquired by an Australian public gallery.

## 15 *Art students* 1895

oil on canvas
182.9 x 114.3 cm
inscribed l.l.: E Phillips Fox / 95
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased, 1943

The setting for the painting is the 4th floor studio of the Melbourne School of Art situated in the Cromwell Buildings, Bourke Street. It shows Fox's students at their easels painting portraits. The standing figure in the dotted smock in the centre is Cristina Asquith Baker to whom Fox dedicated the study for the painting; the dark-haired figure seated behind her is Fox's cousin Etta Phillips (Lottie's sister); on the extreme right is Ina (Georgina) Gregory. These young women came from well-to-do middle-class families. The antique head in the background of the painting is a reminder that the school taught a full academic curriculum, starting with a study of casts. This fine painting, also shown at the Grafton Gallery exhibition, introduced important compositional innovations and challenged contemporary critical assumptions about the nature of subject matter appropriate for a museum-scale painting. The unorthodox key-hole composition cropping the canvas at the edges, the blurring and flattening of the faces, and the 'meaningless' subject were criticised both in Melbourne and in England, being identified with Whistler and Impressionism.

E. Phillips Fox
95

## 16 *Miss Reidy* (c.1895)

oil on canvas
71.0 x 46.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: To Miss Reidy / souvenir /
E Phillips Fox
Private collection

During the 1890s at 'Charterisville', Fox painted some of his most charming works of young women in outdoor settings. This portrait of his student (later his assistant) Lilla Reidy was painted in autumn 1895 and exhibited in the Victorian Artists' Society winter exhibition that year. Fox was fond of painting seasonal changes, especially autumn. Placing the sitter by the stream, Fox set himself the challenge of capturing the various effects of light on different surfaces by sensitive manipulation of colour tones. This autumnal painting forms an interesting comparison with the profile portrait of *Miss Veitch* (c.1899) painted on a summer's day.

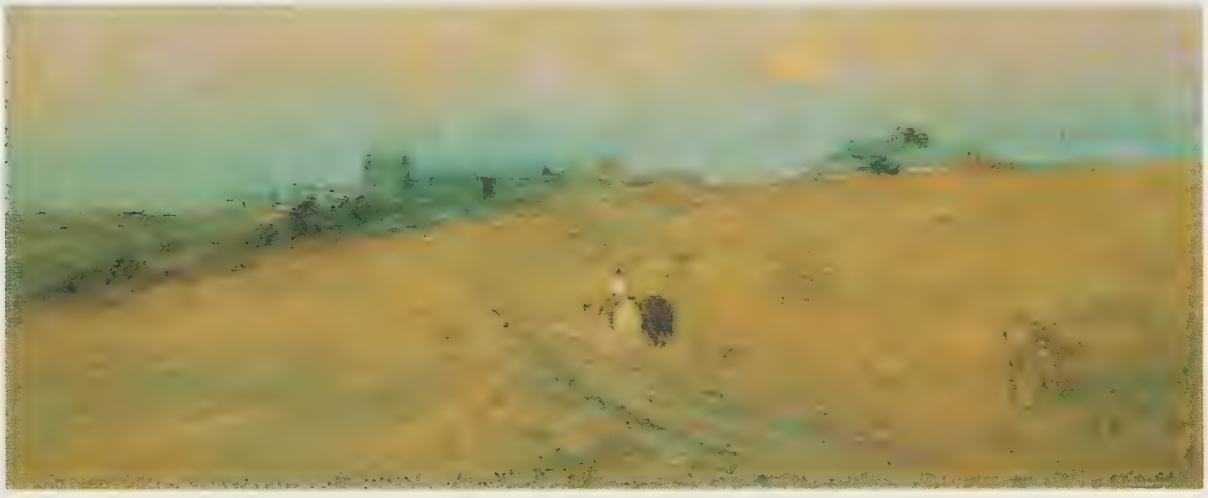
## 17 *The setting sun* (c.1895)

oil on canvas
48.4 x 114.8 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection, Melbourne

This work, also painted at 'Charterisville', views the buildings from below and highlights Fox's use of thick Impressionist strokes to evoke a sense of airiness and heat. There are also intriguing contrasts of yellow, orange and blue. Fox was censured in the press for his treatment, yet in hindsight his technique was one of the important legacies he left to artists in Melbourne. He taught this method at the summer school in 'Charterisville'. The slight narrative element in the work reflects Fox's contact with English rural painters.

A work entitled *Homewards*, shown in the Victorian Artists' Society winter exhibition of 1895, depicted an identical scene 'in which at the close of day a man riding one horse and leading another ascends the road to a village whose silhouette is seen against the sky' (*Age*, 10 May 1895, p.6). As the price listed for that work in the catalogue is only £1.1.0, it was probably a study for *The setting sun*. Another study, shown in the same exhibition, survives; *Evening* is remarkably similar to *The setting sun* but has a sombre palette.

The painting is also known as *Moonrise*.

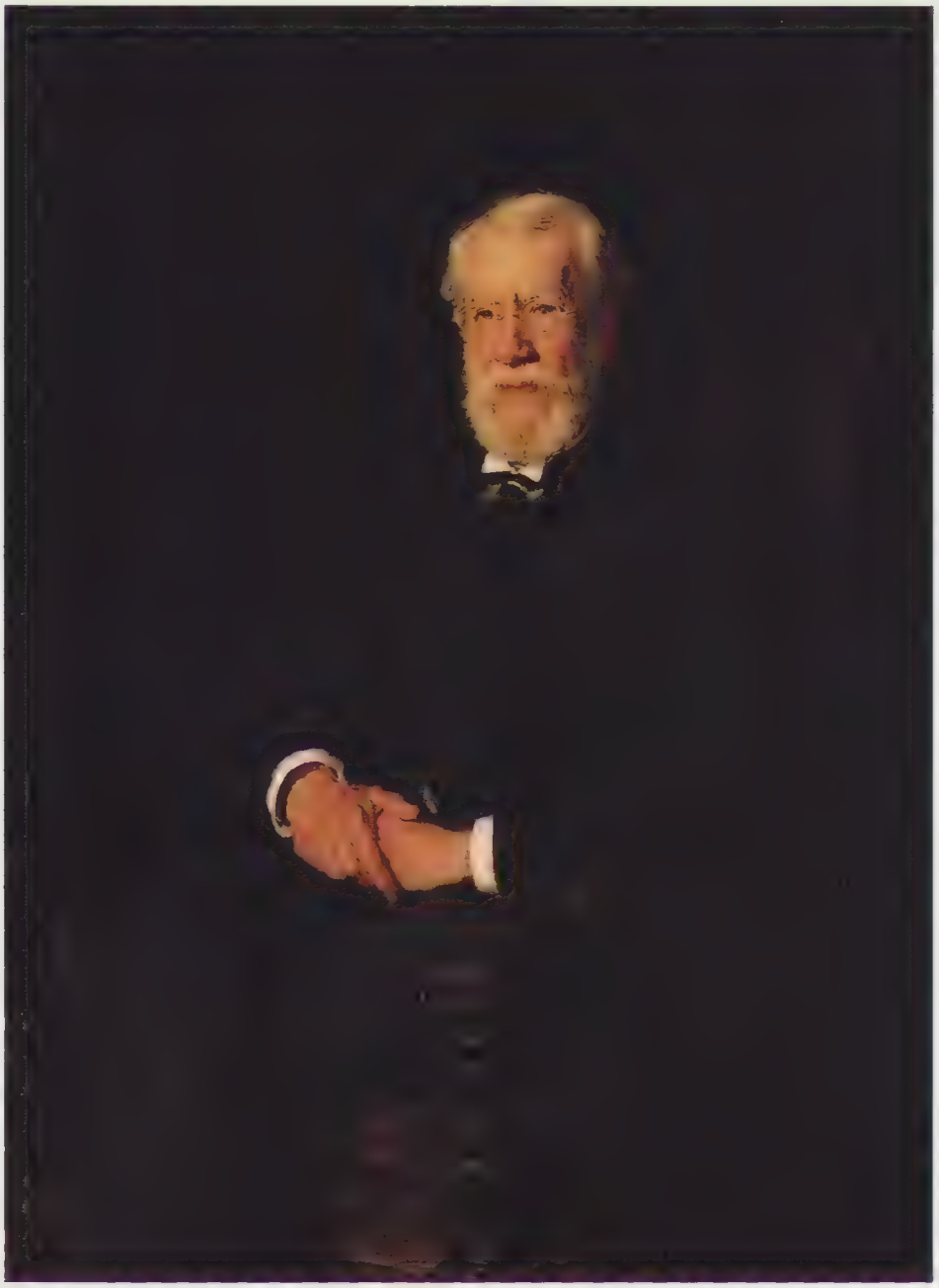


## 18 *Robert L.J. Ellery, Government Astronomer, Victoria* 1896

oil on canvas
128.6 x 94.4 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox. / Nov. 96
National Gallery of Victoria
Presented by subscribers, 1897

Likeness and characterisation were not always Fox's strong points. However, as the critic for the Melbourne *Table Talk* observed (4 December 1896, p.2), this portrait was particularly successful:

> The intense listening expression, always a noticeable characteristic of the sitter, is so well caught that to see the portrait is to see the man. The pose too conveys a sense of quietude and good-humoured patience with the rush and turmoil of the world about him. Perhaps the greatest charm of Mr Fox's picture is its perfect representation of a rich and serene old age, the outcome of a life devoted to promoting the intellectual well-being of his fellow men.



## 19 *Dolly, daughter of Hammond Clegg Esq.* 1896

oil on canvas
95.9 x 73.4 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / July 96.
Private collection, Melbourne

Fox had a special empathy for children and he invented a range of compositions for their portraits. Among the many portraits of children Fox painted during the 1890s, this depiction was considered particularly appealing because of the choice of a pose which evoked the characteristic behaviour and mood of a child. The little figure shown listening to a story was given a very full description in the press. While commending Fox for the painting of textures and colour the critics were particularly inventive in their descriptions of the child's reactions. The *Table Talk* critic (21 August 1896, p.6) felt the 'childish trust and innocence … is absolutely entrancing … Such a child could not do anything mean.'

This painting was given a special showing with several other children's portraits in Fox's studio in August 1896 and was subsequently displayed in the Victorian Artists' Society annual exhibition in October.

## 20 *The milking shed* (c.1899)

oil on canvas
39.5 x 102.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased, 1955

This elegant, unusually scaled twilight painting, together with other landscapes in this exhibition, demonstrates the range and quality Fox had achieved by the end of the 1890s in areas other than figure painting. Fox shared with Walter Withers and David Davies a love for twilight and moonlight scenes. The mood evoked by late day scenes came to typify the spirit of Australia; the preference for suggestive qualities reflects something of the *fin de siècle* influence of the symbolist movement in Australia. Fox's scenes are characterised by the exciting animation which he brings to his skies.

He showed a painting entitled *Milking shed* in his solo exhibitions in Melbourne (in October) and Sydney (in December) 1900, and *Milking time* in the Victorian Artists' Society annual exhibition in January 1900. These probably represent the present painting.

## 21 *Autumn evening* 1899

oil on canvas
74.4 x 112.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / 99
City of Box Hill, Melbourne
Gift of J.S. Gawler, 1952

This freshly painted scene is the most ambitious of several landscapes Fox painted of the river bank at 'Charterisville'. He confidently executes a large-scale composition of trees, water and sky. It is an excellent example of his mastery of the medium by the late 1890s. Interest is sustained through the use of subtle greens and blues that create a wonderful sense of moist atmosphere.

An earlier title of the painting was *The pool* and, thus entitled, it was exhibited by Ethel Carrick Fox several times after her husband's death. However, a contemporary description by the *Argus* critic (18 January 1900, p.9) reviewing the Victorian Artists' Society annual exhibition confirms that Fox exhibited it there as *Autumn evening*. 'This picture … shows a foreground of dark foliage, a glimpse of river with cattle faintly seen, and above all a piled-up cloud-bank in the east, rose-tinted like an Alpine Peak in the reflected light from the setting sun.'

## 22 *Miss Veitch* (c.1899)

oil on canvas
42.0 x 35.6 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection, Sydney

Elizabeth was the daughter of the tenant dairy farmer William Veitch and his wife Jane who lived at 'Charterisville' and sub-let part of the main house and cottages to artists. 'Lizzie' Veitch married the musical impresario Charles Tait in 1899 and several years later featured as Kate Kelly riding a horse in the Tait brothers' film *Ned Kelly*. Fox painted her several times, as did Tudor St George Tucker.

## 23 *The spring* 1900

oil on canvas
107.9 x 75.6 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox 1900
Private collection

This uphill landscape fittingly presented in a vertical format is an important example of several large-scale landscapes Fox painted at 'Charterisville' for the two exhibitions he held in 1900 shortly before departing for Europe. He loved painting the changing seasons, and the Heidelberg area with its European trees was the ideal locale. *The spring*, with its slender trees set against a sky full of clouds, is painted in predominantly warm colours presenting an interesting contrast to the autumnal scene represented by *The pines*.

The painting was not exhibited under this title in either of Fox's two exhibitions in 1900. The original title is unknown.

## 24 *The pines* 1900

oil on canvas
122.2 x 81.3 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox 1900
The Australian Club, Melbourne
Presented by Sir James Balderstone, 1953

Fox's landscape was among the large-scale works depicting contrasting times of day and seasons which he exhibited in his two solo exhibitions in 1900. He also showed it at the *Commonwealth Exhibition of Australian Art* in Sydney in January 1901. Next to his *Autumn showers*, acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1901, this was his second-highest-priced landscape.

This autumn scene shares with Fox's other landscapes his feeling for freshness and airiness, especially in his painting of the sky. Despite the overall impression of dominant greens the painting is vibrant with lively colours — blues, touches of yellow and warm brown.

## 25 *The corn field* (c.1900–04)

oil on canvas
50.1 x 121.9 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Foster's Brewing Group Limited

This is one of Fox's major landscapes, probably painted in the summer of 1900 in the horizontal format used in several of his other 1890s landscapes. The bright sunlight, red poppies and touches of vivid blue contrast with the emerald moonlight scenes also painted at this time and the cooler, darker-toned greens of his twilight and winter landscapes. Fox first painted scenes of harvest on his initial trip to France and again, briefly, in 1904 when he returned for the second time.

The paint is fairly thickly applied, its density comparable to similar treatment in *The pines*, a cool autumn scene.

The painting first appeared under its present title in Fox's solo exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney in 1908, so it could have been painted from sketches made in France in 1904. However, a painting entitled *Harvesting*, exhibited in Fox's solo exhibitions in 1900 and described by a critic in the Melbourne *Arena* (20 October 1900, p.5) matches the present painting: '*Harvesting* is particularly decorative in treatment: the red poppies and blue cart enhance most happily the pleasant scene.' The price listed for *Harvesting* is only 12 guineas as compared with 55 guineas for *The pines*, but comparable to the 10 guineas asked for *The milking shed.*

## 26 *Moonrise, Heidelberg* 1900

oil on canvas
76.3 x 126.5 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox / 1900
National Gallery of Victoria
Purchased, 1948

This work is an exquisite harmony of blues and greens, with a painted moon decoratively reflected in the water on the right. The sky comes to life with small quivering brushstrokes moving in varied directions. Although a nocturnal scene, the painting is vivid in colour. In the decorative treatment Fox owes a debt to Whistler; yet the painting conveys a sense of a particular locality and evokes the moist night air.

The work may have been exhibited originally in Fox's two solo exhibitions in 1900 under the title *Autumn moonrise*, priced similarly to *The pines*. It was consistently well reviewed by the Melbourne and Sydney papers. The description in the *Arena* (20 October 1900, p.5) fits the painting:

> *Autumn moonrise* is exceptionally good; the impression of looking down from a height towards a small pond, and the low hill, is given without apparent effort, and without resort to any trick. The colour is most skilfully managed.

Its companion picture *Moonrise summer evening* was described as 'suffused with balmy atmosphere'.

The painting was sent to England, where Fox exhibited it at the Royal Academy in 1903 and at the Salon in 1910. Fox wrote to McCubbin from London on 16 May 1903 that the *Moonrise* he exhibited at the Royal Academy was 'painted from an Australian one and much improved' (McCubbin Papers, LaTrobe Library, MS 8525 987/2).

## 27 *The landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770* 1902

oil on canvas
226.0 x 194.7 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox 1902
National Gallery of Victoria
Gilbee Bequest, 1902

Fox received the commission for this painting from the Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria on the eve of Federation, with funds left by the surgeon William Gilbee in his will, and the request that the work be painted in England. Fox painted *The landing* at St Ives after carefully researching the site at Kurnell, sketching Aboriginals at La Perouse reserve, reading Captain Cook's diary and consulting naval authorities in England about the uniforms.

The three major considerations were authenticity, grandeur of scale and the choice of a dramatic moment. For the white man the painting was a celebration of an event of momentous significance and a strengthening of ties with the British Empire; the Aboriginal viewpoint is not known. To depict the grand event Fox looked to British history paintings, following the tradition of Benjamin West. At its reception in Melbourne in 1902 the painting was praised for its breadth, drama and colour. This was a prestigious commission for Fox but he never again painted a nationalistic scene.

## 28 *A LOVE STORY* 1903

oil on canvas
101.8 x 152.7 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / 1903
Ballarat Fine Art Gallery
Martha Pinkerton Bequest, 1944

With this painting Fox introduced into his work a new conception of the female figure — one of urbanity, grace and elegance. Fox had exhibited an earlier version in the Victorian Artists' Society annual exhibition in January 1900 but as he wrote to McCubbin on 16 May 1903: 'I felt a lot of it weak, and made a great number of fresh studies, and quite changed the composition and modified the colour scheme.' It was one of the works with which Fox made his debut at the Royal Academy. Fittingly, it was also Fox's entry into the New Salon in Paris in 1906. Its favourable reception by the British press boosted Fox's confidence. The original model was Fox's student at 'Charterisville', Ursula Foster, as George Clausen later confirmed in a letter to Bernard Hall. The figure, presented close-up in a daring diagonal, conveys a sense of human nearness. The undulating forms and decorative conception suggest that Fox was beginning to draw inspiration from new sources.

## 29 *Woodland nymphs* 1904

oil on canvas
112.3 x 152.2 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / 04
Private collection

This painting is an important milestone in Fox's work, initiating a direction towards compositions of multiple elegant figures. It looks back to *A love story* in its *intimiste* portrayal, and forward to the later sociable *déjeuner* settings where the striped dress would yield interest for its pattern and decorative potential. When Fox exhibited it at the Royal Academy he gave it the title *Woodland nymphs*, which suggests something of its dreamlike mood in the semi-arcadian setting. This is one of the last paintings in which Fox used the combination of cool greens and russet tones as a foil for white. Later he used more vivid colours. Perhaps one source of inspiration for the composition and mood was his renewed interest in Whistler's paintings, such as *Symphony in white, no. 3*, shown in the retrospectives in London following the American artist's death in 1903.

## 30 *Study of a peasant woman* (c.1904)

oil on wood panel
35.0 x 26.5 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

## 31 *The harvest field* 1905

oil on canvas
113.5 x 153.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox 1905
City of Box Hill, Melbourne
Gift of J.S. Gawler, 1952

Many small sketches painted near Chartres in the second half of 1904 culminated in this large-scale painting of peasants with which Fox sought to represent himself at both the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon. The theme revives Fox's fascination with peasant figures but, unlike his earlier portrayals, this painting indicates a stronger interest in figures engaged in rural labour. The palette has changed to warmer colours which Fox has used to evoke both the heat of the day and a sense of tiring work.

## 32 *Al fresco* (c.1905)

oil on canvas
153.6 x 195.6 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Art Gallery of South Australia
Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund, 1908

This painting is central to Fox's *oeuvre*, initiating the theme of the family repast in elegant, intimate arbour settings. It anticipates characteristics of Fox's later work: the richer and warmer palette, the delight in contrasts of light and shade, the sparkle of dappled light forming delicate patterns of colour. In its easy sociability it remains a more spontaneous creation than some of the later works. It is not known where the picture was painted but the elegance and palette strongly suggest a French milieu. The female figure in the light-coloured dress was probably modelled on Fox's wife.

With this painting Fox was elected an associate of the New Salon early in 1907. When it was exhibited on his visit to Australia in 1908 it was generally liked but one critic felt that 'somehow the work, excellent in every detail, has no appeal to Australians to whom out-of-door eating suggests abominable memories of flies and bull ants' (*Table Talk*, 5 March 1908, p.25).

The exhibition affords the exciting opportunity for viewing the entire *déjeuner* series together for the first time.

## 33 *Père Rivart with his granddaughter* (c.1905–6)

oil on canvas
74.2 x 103.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox / 1906
Private collection, Melbourne

This work showing a kindly man playing with his baby granddaughter was exhibited with the Royal Society of Portrait Painters in London in 1905 as *Le Père Rivart et sa Grand-Fille* (sic). It focuses on one of Fox's enduring themes, the closeness of family life. It was painted from studies made in France, probably in a village near Chartres where Fox spent the summer of 1904. As he painted several pictures of Père Rivart, he may have boarded with the family. This is one of Fox's last paintings portraying the French peasant. Henceforth he would paint the elegant life.

## 34 *Portrait of a young girl* 1906

oil on canvas
141.5 x 92.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / 1906
National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1942

The early years of the 20th century, when Fox was in England, saw a major revival of interest in 18th-century art. *Portrait of a young girl* draws on this experience. As in many paintings by Reynolds, Fox's sitter is dignified by the low viewpoint and the setting of the figure against the sky. Fox was fond of including a flower-bedecked hat as an elegant accessory and as an important decorative and compositional feature in his paintings.

## 35 *St Mark's, Venice* (1907)

oil on canvas
46.0 x 61.4 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection

Fox and his wife went to Venice in the spring of 1907 for several months. During their stay both painted many scenes of picturesque sites in sparkling sunlight and in subdued tones by night.

More carefully worked out and larger in scale that most of Fox's portrayals of Venice, this work evidently was conceived as an exhibition painting. Fox enjoyed painting St Mark's and was fascinated by the colourful crowds filling the Piazza. It is among his first paintings to use the crowd for its decorative interest. In this it anticipates his later paintings in which the figures, differently costumed, reappear as holiday strollers in his *Bathing hour* and as a dominant group of holiday-makers in *The ferry.*

## 36 *Mother and child* 1908

oil on canvas
99.1 x 73.7 cm
inscribed l.l.: E PHILLIPS Fox / 1908
The Joseph Brown Collection

The theme of mother and child was deeply meaningful to Fox, recurring in various ways and times throughout his life. It culminated in his painting *Motherhood*, for which *Mother and Child* is a study. The work epitomises his celebration of motherhood, his fondness for painting children and his ability to convey a mood of intimacy. Although the theme had wide currency and Fox's picture was part of a broad general trend, the genesis of the painting had a personal context. The work was begun in Australia in 1908, with Fox first painting a small, direct sketch of his brother David's wife Irene with the baby Bonnie. Subsequently he tried out the theme freshly on a larger scale, as is seen in this work, before developing a more formal version.

The final work, *Motherhood* (1908), was painted in Paris. With this tour de force Phillips Fox won the title of *sociétaire* at the New Salon. In Melbourne, where Fox and his wife had set up a studio in his brother David's house in Bates Street, Malvern, Fox painted many sketches of the three children — Louise, Bonnie and Len — and of the garden. Working from direct studies, he progressively modified the image. The aim was not a casual Impressionist image but the celebration of motherhood as an idea; Irene Fox was made to look taller by standing on a box, she wore a special dress and her features were regularised, the graciousness enhanced. The baby is still Bonnie, but the other child became a blend of several images. Len Fox has recounted his mother's recollection: 'The head is Louise's, the body is Cousin Dorothy's and the feet Cousin Rosie's'. The background was developed in his mother Rosetta's home in Finch Street, Malvern, where Fox painted 'part of her garden as the background'.

## *Motherhood* 1908

oil on canvas
183.7 x 112.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox 1908
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased, 1913

This painting is not in the exhibition.

## 37 *Bathing hour* (c.1909)

oil on canvas
180.4 x 112.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum
T.C. Stewart Bequest Fund, 1952

Like *Motherhood* this large painting is redolent with memories of Australia, particularly the beach at Chelsea, near Melbourne, where the Foxes picnicked with the children and painted studies of youngsters playing on the waterfront. It was begun after the artist's visit to the beaches in northern France, in particular Trouville, where Fox made at least one sketch of a similarly angled sea of a sapphire blue, with a woman drying a small child. The painting blends Fox's dual interests — fascination with colour and sunlight, and powerfully modelled forms that echo his academic training. While lively holiday crowds are seen on the water's edge, the mother and child are set apart in the intimacy of their domestic ritual.

The original version, entitled *By the sea* when shown at the Royal Academy in 1909 and *L' heure du bain* at the Paris Salon in 1912, is now in the Queensland Art Gallery, known there until recently as *On the beach*. Fox exhibited that version in Australia in 1913 as *Bathing hour*. The Castlemaine painting is a later version with slight changes: the mother's face is now positioned against a distant group of people, not set against the water as in the earlier work, and her features are different.

## 38 *Promenade* (c.1909)

oil on wood panel
26.6 x 35.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Together with a group of other small panels painted outdoors, this joyous beach scene contrasts with Fox's more formally organised larger works such as *Bathing hour* and *The ferry*. It was painted directly on the spot at Trouville and in the lively paint surfaces and colour captures something of the immediacy of the artist's feeling. Yet even in such a spontaneous work Fox subtly contains the scene, directing the eye inwards by means of the railing and ground lines towards the striped bathing boxes and people, and to the sand, water and tiny figures in the distance.

## 39 *On the sands* (c.1909)

oil on wood panel
25.5 x 33.7 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection, Perth

Painted about the time Fox and his wife Ethel Carrick visited several French beach resorts, this little panel shows a very fresh response to colour and light, unhampered by the selfconsciousness sometimes evident in his larger works. In the midst of the holiday-makers the figure in a blue-striped dress, plumed hat and little white boots arrested Fox's attention. No doubt Fox had seen a figure like this promenading along the beach, but its recurrence in several paintings suggests that it may have been painted from a model.

## 40 *Study of standing man* (c.1907–09)

oil on wood panel
21.4 x 13.7 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

## 41 *The arbour* (1910)

oil on canvas
190.5 x 230.7 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1916

A leisurely summer's afternoon is beautifully encapsulated in this image of a family at afternoon tea. The warmth of the sunlight and the enclosed setting accentuate the closeness of the people and the mood of harmony. Fox drew the individual sitters from his own family circle: the woman in the wicker chair is probably the artist's wife; the little boy is based on a study of Len that Fox painted at his brother David's home in Malvern; the girl was probably Fox's niece Louise. It is not known who modelled for the man or the woman with a parasol. The publicity-seeking female impersonator Herbert Dyce-Murphy falsely claimed to have been the model for the woman but the picture was not painted in Bath in 1902 as he asserted; it was painted in Paris in 1910 in Fox's own garden. The face of the woman in white resembles that of Edith Anderson (see No. 52).

Fox tried out at least a dozen versions of the composition in his sketchbook. There are also oil sketches of the individual people. In the conception of this painting a wealth of Fox's experiences came together: his own philosophy of family life, his love for the people he painted and his delight in Monet's work. The feeling is close to that evoked by Monet's *Luncheon* (1872) in the Caillebotte Collection which formed part of Fox's cherished images of art.

## 42 *Déjeuner* (c.1910–11)

oil on canvas
151.6 x 112.6 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Lionel Lindsay Art Gallery and Library Trust
The Lionel Lindsay Collection

Not seen outside Queensland since its acquisition, this version of the *déjeuner* theme is presented in a vertical format. The individual figures are more prominent and interest is concentrated on the bond between mother and child. The reverse of the painting bears a label inscribed 'Mother and Child no. 1', which suggests something of Fox's intention. Apart from the sense of human closeness, we are drawn to the richly laden table, itself a symbol of plenitude, nurture and motherly care. In all Fox's *déjeuner* paintings the table as the centre for human encounters receives special attention, with lovingly painted textures of cloth, food, utensils and blooms. A French maid was part of the lifestyle depicted and we know that the Foxes had a maid in Paris. The setting of at least two of the *déjeuner* paintings was the Foxes' Paris garden, which the artists had specially planned as a leafy enclosure that would create filtered sunlight.

## 43 *Resting* (c.1910–11)

oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.3 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Queensland Art Gallery
Gift of W.S. Acworth in memory
of Ivy Mabel Acworth, 1956

Fox began painting nudes in 1909, some in an arbour setting, others indoors. They were exhibited in France and, later, in Australia; only the most demure canvas, *Bathers*, was shown in England. The poses and boudoir settings closely reflect the work of other Salon painters. *Resting* is perhaps the finest of Fox's nudes in an interior setting and the least conventional. It is beautifully composed with the titian-haired golden nude offset by surrounding lavenders and greens. Light filtering through a gauze curtain fills the room with a mellow atmosphere.

Lionel Lindsay reproduced this work in *Art in Australia* in 1925 under the title *Rest*. A work bearing the French equivalent, *Repos*, was exhibited in Paris, in the Salon of 1911 and with the International Society of Painters and Sculptors in 1912. It is tempting to think that it was the above painting. The catalogues of Fox's Australian exhibitions of 1913 record a painting entitled *Repose*.

## 44 *Study for* The ferry (c.1910)

oil on wood panel
26.5 x 33.7 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

According to Fox's friend, the painter Violet Teague, *The ferry* was painted from studies made at Trouville.

In this freshly painted early version of *The ferry* Fox worked out the basic compositional idea centred on the boat, the landing and the two figures, the female in white and the boatman. Such direct compositional studies exist, or once existed, for Fox's other large-scale works. It was part of his academic training to create a work through various preparatory stages.

The final painting is more sumptuous in both colour and composition. The scene remains sharply tilted and viewed from above but the colour chord is richer and, weaving across the surface, is a group of elegant, gorgeously-costumed figures. The undulating rhythm recalls something of Watteau's famous *Embarkation for Cythera*, then widely celebrated, and something of *art nouveau* grace and flow. The linking hands of the man and woman are reminiscent of the *Embarkation* and some of its late 19th-century sequels by Renoir.

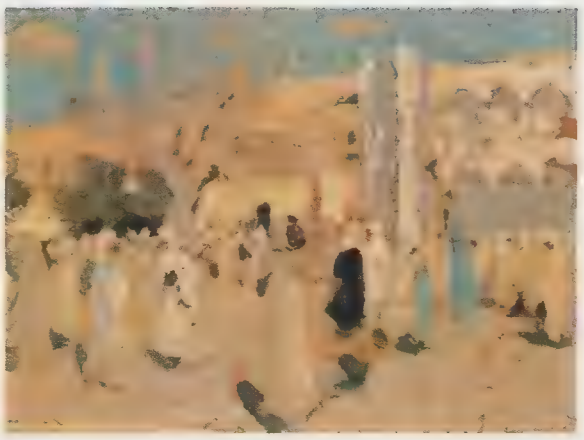
## *The ferry* (c.1910–11)

oil on canvas
114.6 x 152.4 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased, 1949

This painting is not in the exhibition.

## 45 *The desert market* (1911)

oil on wood panel
16.0 x 22 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. P. Fox
The D.R. Sheumack Collection



In February 1911, after sending in their Salon works, Fox and his wife took a painting trip to northern Africa. They visited Algiers, Bou Saada, Tangier and returned via Cadiz, Seville, Cordova, Granada, Toledo and Madrid.

Fox was delighted by the colour and light as well as the busy crowds of the desert markets. Challenged by the different light conditions, his palette developed in a higher key. This work was painted on the spot, probably at Bou Saada where they spent about six weeks. From it Fox developed a larger painting.

## 46 *Moroccan girl* (1911)

oil on canvas
22.0 x 16.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. PHILLIPS Fox
Private collection, Sydney

This small study is an example of Fox's spontaneous record of his sitter. Judging by her outfit she was probably a dancing girl. Fox, like many Western painters, stood apart from the alien culture, tending to capture the scenes and people for their visual enchantment.

## 47 *Street in Morocco* (1911)

oil on wood panel
16.0 x 22.0 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. PHILLIPS Fox
Private collection, Sydney

As the Foxes had to carry all their painting equipment, tiny wood panels were ideal. They also lent themselves to rapid recording of the passing moment. Fox left some areas of the panels unpainted, using the blond wood to suggest the heat and the sun. This delightful panel is a good example of the practice. The evident pleasure Fox took in painting the scene is reflected in the lusciousness of the paint, not evident to the same extent in his European works.

## 48 *Moslems in procession* (1911)

oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. PHILLIPS FOX
Manly Art Gallery and Museum
Gift of the Ladies' Auxiliary, 1972

Fox's trip to Morocco resulted in a number of colourful paintings inspired by the blazing light and richly costumed local people. He had no understanding of their religious customs. This painting demonstrates his response to a Moslem procession: it is an exciting visual spectacle. Fox plays off the foreground group of white-veiled Arab women against the lively blues and reds of the male figures, and the varied greens, ochres and bright oranges of the elevated landforms and foliage are contrasted by the sky.

Fox wrote with satisfaction to Hans Heysen (13 September 1911): 'I think I got some quite good ones about 18 x 14 size — painted at one go' (Hans Heysen Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 5073/1/319A). This 38 cm x 46 cm painting must have been one of these works.

Fox exhibited sixteen works painted on the trip with the Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français in Paris in February 1913.

## 49 *Lamplight* (1911)

oil on canvas
188.5 x 229.5 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Gift of Mrs E. Phillips Fox, 1939

In *Lamplight* interest shifts away from the family to a drawing room scene with three women about to take tea. It is late in the day; through the window we see the fall of dusk, and the figures, shown by dimmed lamplight, cast strong shadows. This large-scale painting is more formally organised than Fox's earlier works, and probably painted more slowly. The mood is restful and reflective: the hostess preparing to pour tea is viewed from the back, gracefully inclined; the red-haired figure on the settee has fallen into a reverie, an open book resting in her lap; the figure further away, perhaps a relative of Fox, is blurred in the dusky light. No one speaks but a mood of harmony prevails here as in Fox's other works.

The dress with the black ribbons, worn by the hostess, appears again in *The ferry* and *The muslin dress,* but with an added black fichu around the neckline. Fox and Ethel Carrick had a range of props — striped and white dresses, shawls etc. — which they used repeatedly.

The painting was shown at the Royal Academy in 1911 under its present title and in the Salon of 1912, entitled *Le thé.*

## 50 *The muslin dress* (1912)

oil on canvas
180.2 x 112.5 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1942

Ethel Carrick Fox was probably the model for this painting. The carriage of the head and the profile recall a portrait Fox painted of her for the Royal Academy in 1905. The shape of the head is also similar to that of the woman seated in the wicker chair in *The arbour.*

This painting is a fine example of Fox's ability to suggest mood through colour. The muted tones harmonise, evoking a mood of wistfulness. Deceptive simplicity hides a subtle play of shapes and textures: the gentle silhouette of the figure contrasts with a carefully structured scheme of rectangles — the table, picture and window. Light filters through the curtains, forming a pattern of a surprising yellow–green.

The filmy curtains, the embroidered tablecloth, the tea-set and the elegant hat form part of the woman's intimate world: it is her milieu. Fox's work showed affinity with the preoccupations of French *intimiste* painters.

## 51 *The lesson* (1912)

oil on canvas
183.6 x 112.6 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1925

Returning to the theme of mother and child, Fox fills the room with sunlight and colour. The central figures share a moment of intimacy while reading a story-book; their silhouettes blend. The image, in reverse, parallels that of the woman in white with the child in *The arbour* and perhaps depicts the same sitters. But how different they are in the new setting and colour ambience, placed within a vertical canvas. The interior contains features seen before — the table with the tea-set and pink roses beneath a softly curtained window — yet within the new chromatic pattern they are part of a vibrant decorative ensemble — the striped wallpaper, the peacock divan, the floor, the figures, and the sunlight streaming in through the window. Despite all this richness nothing distracts us from the peaceful image of the mother and child.

## 52 *Nasturtiums* (c.1912)

oil on canvas
91.3 x 71.3 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection, Melbourne

This is Fox's most exquisite portrayal of his favourite sitter. The image appears wonderfully spontaneous, the blaze of nasturtiums providing a perfect foil for the delicate white and pale mauve dress and elegant hat. The painting highlights the qualities Fox cherished: elegance, urbanity and a civilised lifesyle. His graceful women spending leisured hours in sunlit gardens perfectly encapsulate a sense of time standing still and celebrate a way of life soon to be harshly disrupted by the onset of war.

Edith Susan Gerard Anderson, also an artist, had left France to return to Australia in 1909. At the Salon of 1911 Fox showed a *Portrait de Miss Gérard Anderson* but it was not this painting. There is uncertainty about the date of her return to Paris; it may have been 1911. Edith stayed with the Foxes in 1912 and took painting lessons from Phillips Fox. The present work was probably painted in the summer of that year.

## 53 *The green parasol* (c.1912)

oil on canvas
117.0 x 89.5 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Edith Anderson was the model for this painting, too, and the setting is Fox's Paris garden. Fox knew Edith well. He introduced her to Penleigh Boyd in 1912 and gave her away at their wedding in October of that year.

This enchanting work epitomises the artist's particular love for the figure in sunlight, his feeling for colour, here shown in the full blaze of a summer's day, and his fascination with contrasts of sunlight and shade. Fox was intrigued by the reflections of the green parasol on the sitter's face, skin and dress and this interest is implicit in the title of the painting. Unlike *Nasturtiums*, in this work paint is applied more heavily (especially in the flowers one is aware of drier and more chalky-textured paint) but flashes of unpainted canvas suggest light and air.

## 54 *On the balcony* (1912)

oil on canvas
96.5 x 64.7 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection, Melbourne

In this painting of Edith, Fox has captured an image of a sophisticated woman in a black hat and gloves, attired in a mauve costume edged in black. Leaning against a balustrade with one arm resting on a parasol, she stands silhouetted against a background of sunlit leaves.

Apart from the sheer quality and centrality of these works (52 to 55) in Fox's *oeuvre*, we hope they will help to solve the intriguing question of who the sitters were for some of the other paintings: was Mrs Fox the model, was it Mrs Boyd, or neither? We need to lay to rest the myth of the male posing as a woman in several of Fox's works, when Mrs Boyd was probably the model. Her nieces claimed she posed for the mother in *Bathing hour*; she certainly sat for *The green parasol* and probably also for *The arbour* and some other paintings.

An alternative title for this work is *The mauve dress* and an additional inscription on the back of the painting reads *Lady on a balcony*. Fox exhibited a work under the title *Sur le balcon* with the *Société Internationale de Peinture et de Sculpture 30° Exposition* at the Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, in December 1912.

## 55 *Mrs Penleigh Boyd* (1912)

oil on canvas
81.5 x 68.5 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

This painting shows Edith wearing her going-away dress as described in the *British Australasian* (24 October 1912, p.21): 'The bride … looked charming in her travelling dress of dull blue velvet, with a picture hat of white plush lined with black velvet.'

Fox presented Edith in a fashionable street costume and veil, the epitome of elegance. The conception of the subject is totally different from that in the previous work and shows Fox's inventiveness in response to a sitter with whom he felt a special rapport.

The signature, E. Phillips Fox, is attached to the back on a strip of canvas. The painting was probably cut.

## 56 *Green wave, Manly* (c.1914)

oil on canvas
46.2 x 61.3 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
National Gallery of Victoria
Bequest of Herbert and Ivy Brookes, 1973

When Fox returned to Australia in 1913 he spent the later months of that year painting around the harbour inlets of Sydney. Tnese became his favourite painting sites; he particularly enjoyed working at Cremorne and Manly. 'I hope to get a few good seascapes — the colour is very fine at Manly', Fox wrote to his Melbourne dealer W.H. Gill on 5 November 1913 (William Henry Gill Papers, ML MS 285/2). Early in 1914 he returned to Sydney and continued to paint around the harbour in preparation for a joint exhibition with his wife, which opened in Melbourne on 6 May that year. Among the works were 'some accurate wave studies' and the *Argus* critic (5 May 1914, p.9) commended *Green wave* for its 'motion … living its brief life in rhythmic colour.'

## 57 *Cremorne Point* (c.1913–14)

oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox
Private collection, Sydney

This harbour scene was painted by Fox on his final return to Australia. He and his wife made several trips to Sydney. Fascinated by the play of light on water and the picturesque coastline, both artists loved to paint the harbour. This is a particularly successful composition with white sails flitting across the water, curving headland set against a more distant shoreline and Conder-like figures providing colour accents in the foreground.

E. Phillips Fox

## 58 *Henry Gyles Turner* 1914

oil on canvas
127.4 x 97.0 cm
inscribed l.r.: E. Phillips Fox / 1914
National Gallery of Victoria
Presented by subscribers, 1914

Henry Gyles Turner (1831–1920) was eighty-two years old when Fox was commissioned to paint this portrait. Turner was a remarkable figure with diverse interests. He was a banker, a historian and a man of literary pursuits. His connection with the National Gallery commenced in 1884 when he became a Trustee, eventually being elected President of the Trustees.

The portrait was commissioned for the National Gallery of Victoria by a number of his friends. It was shown in Melbourne in the Foxes' May 1914 exhibition together with Philips Fox's portrait of another eminent figure, the head of the Medical School at the University of Melbourne, Sir Harry Allen. Both portraits were highly praised. It was felt that Turner's pose indicated '... a slight movement as if about to rise for the purpose of greeting a visitor' (*Argus* 5 May 1914, p.9). Despite the conventional format befitting a worthy member of the community, there is some lively painting, especially of the face.

## 59 *Portrait* 1914

oil on canvas
91.4 x 71.1 cm
inscribed l.l.: E. Phillips Fox 1914
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Presented by Miss Margaret Harris, 1916

Painted in the same year that Fox completed the portrait of Henry Gyles Turner, this portrait of Margaret Harris presents an imposing image, perhaps the most forceful Fox ever painted of a woman. The portrayal has none of the Edwardian elegance often present in Fox's depiction of women; rather it focuses on the character of a strong individual. Colours are subdued and in its structure the work demonstrates how much Fox had gained from his study of Velasquez so many years before.

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